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**Column: On this Memorial Day, honor fallen heroes –and respect living veterans**

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This Memorial Day, we honor all those who have given their lives in service to the United States, Wisconsin, and the 81<sup>st</sup> Assembly District. Today is an opportunity to enjoy family and appreciate those around us, but it's not about grilling out or shopping. Memorial Day is a time to celebrate the incredible courage of those who died in order to uphold the ideals we all cherish: honor, strength, compassion, and a desire to help others. It's a chance for us to reconnect with our history and our values by honoring the brave individuals who worked to uphold our freedoms no matter the cost.

In fact, many of these fallen service members called Sauk Prairie, Portage, Baraboo, and other parts of the 81<sup>st</sup> District home. They fought in dozens of conflicts dating back to the Civil War. These brave men and women made a sacrifice we will never forget, and they live on in our hearts and minds every day. We should always remember their selflessness and follow their example of compassion and bravery.

Our community does this in many ways. We host services, potluck meals, parades, and take this chance to gather together and celebrate the lives of those we have lost. No matter our political persuasion, we put our differing views aside and choose to honor the people who died defending the values we share. We make the decision to remember their courage with positivity and warmth that reaches across all political divides. Whether or not we agree on how to solve our state's problems, we can all agree that our veterans and fallen soldiers deserve respect. I have been deeply touched to see my fellow citizens in the 81<sup>st</sup> Assembly District come together this way each year on Memorial Day. This kind of non-partisan cooperation is powerful, and I believe it should be a part of the way we treat each other every day.

Regardless of the way we vote or which party we may identify with, we must continue to put these beliefs aside and treat each other with respect and compassion, just like the men and women who sacrificed their lives for our freedoms. Whether in the long and complex state budget process or during the often contentious election season, we cannot allow politics to get in the way of caring for and supporting our veterans. I have always been committed to this belief, and I encourage my fellow legislators and policymakers at the state and local levels to do the same.

As we honor our fallen heroes this Memorial Day, let's not forget the veterans that still live among us as family, friends, and neighbors. As we make decisions about how to allocate our resources to support them, we must remember how they have supported us in defending our freedoms. They often serve critical roles in our communities, and we cannot forget their service – just as we do not forget the sacrifice of those who died for our country and our state.